

NOTES OF INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEETING

BBC →

12TH DECEMBER 1980

The Past Year

The past year has been a demanding one but it has also been one of outstanding achievement for the Monitoring Service. Our reputation has never stood higher, and our customers have reason to be well satisfied. At the recent Co-ordination Meeting the FBIS warmly praised in particular our coverage of Iran and Poland, and the Persian, Polish and Russian teams have done a splendid job. MDXB said at his liaison meeting last week, "There is a growing awareness of the importance of Monitoring and its increasing contribution to the External Services' output. The Monitoring Service has never failed us, even in the most difficult circumstances." Visitors over the past months, including most recently the BBC Vice-Chairman, have been similarly appreciative.

Finance

After having to make savings this year, it is hoped that if estimates submitted to the FCO are accepted the External Services as a whole should start the new financial year in April at a level of expenditure which takes account of all risen costs. In the current financial year the Monitoring Service had to allow for savings of £130,000 in order to stay within our Cash Limit and absorb the cost (some £85,000) of the re-scalings in the new Pay Relativities scheme. The bulk of those savings were found by halving our capital expenditure. However, sales of Monitoring Service material have been buoyant, and thanks are due to all those who have taken on the extra burdens involved. The increase in sales means we have some money available to restore, before the end of the financial year, some minor capital projects, and funds have been allocated for: the provision of a Gent's toilet on the ground floor; a new rest-room in the Chapel area; new composing and multi-lith machines in Publishing; extension of the main car park to provide another 40 or 50 places; completion of levelling and grassing the area to the east of the main building; an EDS terminal in Listening Room; and a new vending machine in the Restaurant.

As to the future, we shall not have a clear indication of our likely financial position next year until at least the Spring. Even if we get all our risen costs we shall still have to contend with a very tough new Cash Limit (probably not more than 6 per cent for wage costs), and we shall then have to work out once more how we can live within our means. In the interim we shall continue to press with the FCO and MoD the case for an actual increase, in real terms, in our grant in order to take account of the increase in our work-load over the past 12 months and to restore some flexibility to deal with future crises. It has to be said, however, that in the present financial climate it is hard to be optimistic about the chances of getting such extra money.

Developments

Nevertheless we are not in a totally static situation. The Islamabad link is now working and efforts to recruit the extra monitors, funded by the FBIS, are continuing, although it is proving difficult to find candidates with the necessary linguistic qualifications. Preparations for the installation of the dish aerial for the monitoring of Soviet television are proceeding and it should be ready in the Spring. We have run into problems obtaining planning permission for the new cubicle building and we are having to look at an alternative site. We have been investigating the possibility of providing a special telex service of suitable material to an interested government in the Gulf area, and if this is agreed it will provide an extra report writer post, a part-time teleprinter operator, and some useful income. Mead Data Central now have the SWB "on line" in their data bank in the United States and the first, albeit modest, royalties have been assessed. In the longer term, as more and more information is conveyed by electronic methods rather than paper, we shall need to look carefully at the application of the new technology to all our operations.

Pay Relativities Scheme

Implementation of the new scheme has proceeded remarkably smoothly, thanks to the hard work of Personnel and Staff Records staff. The rescalings included in the new scheme have given rise to some anomalies, particularly in regard to staff who had personal incentives. These are being looked at, but it may well not be possible to put everything right at one go. Inter-directorate sub-committees have been set up to investigate new structures for the weekly and for the secretarial and clerical grades, which were not included in the so-called Arundel exercise. Another BBC working party is to begin looking at conditions of service for all staff, and Barry Whitehall has been nominated as the representative of the External Services.

Other Points

The new 30 minute film about the External Services, including Monitoring, has been completed and we shall be making arrangements for it to be shown here.

As from 0900 on 15th December we shall be able to dial direct to BBC London and regional premises by using the appropriate code.

Some Thanks

To all departments and areas for responding so splendidly to the international crises which have kept us fully stretched over the past year, and for contributing to the smooth and efficient running of Caversham Park; and on a personal basis to you all for the help and the welcome you have given to me since I took over from John Rae three months ago. My best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

David Witherow

David Witherow
Head of Monitoring Service

15th December, 1980
pm